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Two Sasanian rock reliefs of the king combatting a lion

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the scene of the Sasanian king combating a lion in two rock reliefs. Most Sasanian Bas-reliefs belong to the first 150 years of the dynasty and most are located in modern Fars province. The reliefs typically depict the king's investiture by a deity (who is usually Ahurā Mazdā, but, in some reliefs, Mithra or Anāhitā), the king with courtiers, the king with his family, the king at war, the king's triumph over his enemies, and the king fighting and hunting wild animals. Two of the bas-reliefs of the king killing animals show him killing lions. One is located at Sar Mašhad and the other, less-known, is kept in the Haft-Tanān Museum, Shiraz, and was discovered at the foothills of Pahnu (Pahnā) Mount in Dārāb. In the ancient Near East, the lion symbolized power, courage, and ferociousness: whoever could confront it successfully was regarded as powerful and brave; consequently, many kings have been portrayed fighting lions (and other wild animals) during this period.*

Key words: Bas-relief, Sasanian, Lion, King as Hunter, Sar Mašhad, Haft-Tanān

Introduction

The Sasanian kings created impressive rock reliefs to commemorate significant events such as ascending the throne or coronation, triumph over their enemies, and the like.[1] Such bas-reliefs were most accessible to the public. Each king had his own style of crown, which appeared in all his depictions, on bas-reliefs, coins, metalwork, and seals.[2]

The real meaning of such images was to record an event or happening through the power of image; some believe that the motifs of these depictions function in ritual and religious contexts.[3] Sasanian bas-reliefs not only demonstrate a historical and significant political event but also provide data about the religious symbols, clothing (both Iranian and non-Iranian), warfare, ornaments, hair and beard styles, and each king's interests in his reign.

Hunting was one of the Sasanian kings' most important pastimes and such activities are recorded in all the artistic media previously mentioned. In Sasanian hunting scenes, the king is either on foot or horseback, hunting or fighting a lion or other animals: leopards, boars, rams, and deer, using his bow, lance, javelins, lasso

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[1] Ghirshman, 1954: 328; Herrmann & Curtis, 2002.
[2] Herzfeld, 1928; Erdmann, 1951.
[3] Schippmann, 1990.

or his sword.[4] Iranian tradition regarded the hunt as an essential part of a prince's education.[5] In Persian literature, there are two terms for hunting, nak̲jīr, and šekār, both of which have spread beyond Iranian languages.[6] Many scholars have studied the history of hunting during the Sasanian Period.[7]

The lion ('šir' in Persian) is among the strongest and most vicious animals that have been portrayed as fighting the king on several silver vessels and Sasanian bas-reliefs. This essay attempts to examine comprehensively the Sar Mašhad [Figs. 1-2] and Haft-Tanān Museum bas-reliefs in which the Sasanian king is shown as a lion-fighter [Figs. 3-4].

The lion held a venerable place in the ancient Near East as a symbol of kingship, power, and the beauty of a wild animal. This animal and the rosette were both symbols intimately associated with Mesopotamian Inanna/Ishtar. In addition, the lion with the rosette, sometimes seen as a sun symbol.[8]

The Persian/Asiatic lion (scientific name: *Panthera leo persica*) was indigenous to Iran and observed throughout Mesopotamia and western regions of Fars province until the middle of the last century. The Persian lion was first described by the Austrian zoologist Johann N. Meyer.[9] Its range historically included Iran, Turkey, Mesopotamia, and as far east as the Indus River in the former Sind province, and into Bengal and Nerbudda rivers in Central India. The most-largest lion communities lived in the woodlands and jungles of Khuzestan (along the Karun River) and Fars, most particularly in the Dašt-e Aržan. The last known sighting of a Persian lion was recorded by an Indian cartographer who worked for the British army on the 22nd of May 1942 near the city of Dezful. The lions likely continued to live for a few more years in Iran.

By the end of the mid-19th century, i.e., within three decades, the Persian lion had become endangered. Since 1945 only 250 Persian lions live in the Gir Forest National Park in northwestern India; they are extinct in the rest of Asia, especially Iran.[10] The earliest photograph of *Panthera leo persica* in Iran was taken by Antoin Sevruguin sometime between 1880 and 1928, in which the lion is held captive by chains.[11]

Panthera leo persica is similar to a tiger in the length of its body and tail but differs in skin color, which is tawny overall without the occurrence of dark vertical stripes. Its skin is thicker than that of African lions; it is distinguished further by a long black tail tassel and a more prominent tuft of hair on its elbows. Black patches are visible at the back of the ears. There is, however, little variation in color between the sides of its body and its abdomen, and between the inner and outer surface of its

[4] Harper, 1986; Ghirshman, 1954: 333; Shapur Shahbazi, 2004; Skupniewicz, 2009; 2020.
[5] Shapur Shahbazi, 2004.
[6] Shapur Shahbazi, 2004.
[7] Shapur Shahbazi, 2004; Gignoux, 1983; Harper & Meyers, 1981; Erdmann, 1936; 1943.
[8] Root, 2002: 198-203.
[9] Meyer, 1826.
[10] Joslin, 1973: 6-11; Majnounian *et al*, 2004: 314; Firouz, 2005: 359-362; Breitenmoser *et al.*, 2008; Singh & Gibson, 2011; Banerjee & Jhala, 2012; Anderson, 2015.
[11] Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Stephen Arpee Collection of Sevruguin Photographs FSA A2011.03 A.01a; Myron Bement Smith collection FSA A.4 2.12.Up.11.

limbs. Additionally, its mane is smaller than that of the African lion. The coloration of the mane varies from lion to lion. Rare lions have very dark manes, which according to research done in Africa, are the ones preferred by lionesses. The young cubs are sometimes born with an even color overall, but often a row of patches is visible on the upper surface of the body, resembling a horizontal stripe. These patches usually disappear after six months but may remain visible for two or more years.[12]

The Sar Mašhad Bas-Relief

First published in 1924 by Ernst Herzfeld, the relief is situated at Sar Mašhad village in the southwest of Kāzerūn, at the eastern edge of Bālek (Aqājari) mountain on the northeastern face of a Gori-Mišan formation rock [Figs. 1-2]. This relief is adjacent to the Middle Persian inscription of the Sasanian high priest, Kartīr, and is surrounded by a curved rectangular frame.[13] The bas-relief has been registered as no. 336 in the National Inventory List. Although Kartīr's inscription is carved above the bas-relief, it does not provide any information about the relief itself.[14] The bas-relief shows Wahrām II (276-293 C.E.) accompanied by Kartīr and his family (or several nobles). The king's body is frontal while his head is in profile. The king wears a crown topped by a large ball, so large that it pierces the relief's frame, a feature also found seen on most of his coins from the latter half of his reign.[15] Wahrām II is dressed in a magnificent long pleated robe that extends down to his ankles; "his expression is calm – he barely glances at the ferocious beast springing at his right arm. His hair is arranged in less formal curls than at Bīšāpūr, but is still in two bunches".[16] The person behind him is the influential high priest, Kartīr, identified by the symbol (a set of shears) carved on his hat. "Kartīr carries his scissors device on his high round hat but has not as yet been awarded the diadem and ties which adorn his hat at Naqš-e Rustam. At Sar Mašhad we see Kartīr with a strong chin and a curving, cruel mouth. Though less elaborate, hat but without a diadem. We can therefore assume that this relief was carved before Kartīr was granted the rank of 'grandee'. He has his hair in the ringlets we have also seen in Wahrām's relief at Naqš-e Rustam. Thus, it may be that hairstyles changed during Wahrām's reign, from massed bunches to the ringlet arrangement of the curls".[17]

Standing behind Kartīr is Šāpur Duḵtak (literally 'daughter of Šāpur'), Wahrām's queen, whose hand is held by the king; she also appears on Wahrām's coins. Finally, a figure can be seen standing behind the queen; his image, however, has been partially eroded. Leo Trümpelmann considered this person the crown prince.[18] Some scholars believe that the female figure is the goddess Anāhitā (Middle Persian form Anāhīd)[19], while others argue that this figure is Šāpur Duḵtak.[20] Wahrām almost

[12] Khalaf, 2006: 147-149; Majnounian *et al*, 2004: 314.
[13] Herzfeld, 1926: 256; 1941: 325-326; Ghasemi, 2013: 69.
[14] Frye, 1949; Henning, 1955; Gignoux, 1968; Hinz, 1969; Skjærvø, 2011.
[15] Göbl, 1971: pls. 3-5; Paruck, 1976: pls. T: iv; Gyselen, 2004; 2012: 208, 462-487.
[16] Herrmann, 1970: 167.
[17] Herrmann, 1970: 169-170.
[18] Trümpelmann, 1975: Taf. 7; Vanden Berghe, 1984: 207.
[19] Boyce *et al.*, 1989; Trümpelmann, 1975.
[20] Lukonin, 1969: 92-93, 179, 193.

certainly chose to have Šāpur Duḵtak portrayed for he did so his coins, metalwork, and reliefs for reasons of dynastic propaganda.[21]

In this scene, Wahrām fights a rapacious lion. The sword, held in his right hand, has penetrated the lion's chest up to the hilt. The angry animal is roaring and has placed his paw on Wahrām's arm while the king calmly fights it. The lion is depicted twice in the relief: first jumping at Wahrām and then lying already dead on the ground at Wahrām's feet. Herzfeld believed that there were two lions, one killed by Wahrām, and the other that attacked him torn apart into two halves. The danger has subsided and the king is guarding the queen with his left hand by keeping her behind him. "All the figures are entirely unconcerned, not because it was all in the day's work of the king to kill lions attacking him and the queen, and hence no reason for the prince and the vizier to get excited, but simply because the picture, as always, symbolizes the king as great Nimrod, admired by the court; it does not represent an actual event".[22] Trümpelmann believes that there is only one lion, which is shown in two different scenes and provides very detailed photographs and a drawing.[23]

In contrast, Katsumi Tanabe sees them as two different lions: he remarks on the shoulder ornament[24] or hair whorl carved near the neck of the standing lion [Fig. 2] and believes that the second lion, which is dead, does not have this ornament.[25] Prods Oktor Skjærvø commented that "the designer of the relief may well have chosen the royal family as models for the otherworldly characters portrayed in the inscription and the common motif of the hunt to illustrate the battle with the wild animals guarding the bridge. If the relief is not thematically related to the inscription, but simply another hunting scene, it is not obvious what the roles of the queen and the chief mowbed, Kartīr, would be, their inclusion being also unique. It also does not explain why Kartīr is portrayed between the king and the queen, differently from the other reliefs of Warahrān II".[26] Margaret Cool Root considered this relief as a heroic scene: allegorical combat between the King of Kings and the King of Beasts. As such, it suggests continuity with an ancient Near Eastern tradition echoed already in the Persian homeland on Achaemenid palace reliefs of the royal hero at Persepolis.[27]

This depiction is important because of the method by which the artist has illustrated, the two lions sharing legs and his skill through which the death of the recumbent lion is portrayed. In this way, the observer intermingles the two images scenes as a consecutive action even though each is a single scene. In the first, Wahrām is in the act of killing the lion, and in the second, the lion (presumably the same animal) lies dead at his feet, its tail and paws separately depicted. The lion on the ground appears to be dead; his paws are abnormally drawn while his tail has spirals around the legs of the lunging lion [Figs. 1-2].

This depiction has been differently interpreted, with some scholars believing it to be an actual event. Either way, this bas-relief enjoys many technical interpretations.

[21] Lukonin, 1969: 179, 193, 227; Harper, 1976: 327.
[22] Herzfeld, 1941: 325 and pl. cxxiii.
[23] Trümpelmann, 1975: fig. 1a.
[24] For more information about the shoulder ornament in the Near Eastern depicted figures see: Kantor, 1947; Bate, 1950; Van Buren, 1950; Vollgraff-Roes, 1953.
[25] Tanabe, 1990: 31-40.
[26] Skjærvø, 2011.
[27] Root, 1979: 223; Skupniewicz, 2020.

Georgina Herrmann argues that "It is impossible to say if this scene records an event that actually happened or if we see here the conventional Near Eastern concept of the mighty hunter-king defeating evil, so often depicted in Assyrian and Achaemenian sculpture. The informality and originality of the Sar Mašhad scene, coupled with the king's protective gesture, seems to suggest that Wahrām was recording an actual incident, and possibly one that occurred nearby".[28] "In his proud stance and the defeat of the lion, Wahrām II has achieved an impressive composition to which little is added by the much-damaged group of three figures on the right".[29] Hubertus Von Gall suggested that two different lions in this bas-relief may symbolize the two enemies of Zoroastrianism.[30] Adrian David Hugh Bivar differs in his interpretation of the lions, associating them with Wahrām II's two enemies: the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Carus (282-283 C.E.), and Wahrām II's younger brother, Hormozd Kušānšāh (270-283 C.E.), both of whom Wahrām defeated during his reign.[31]

Few bas-reliefs commemorate Wahrām II's victories, owing to his peaceful reign, during which he did not triumph in war or attempt to expand his territory. Consequently, he has been mostly portrayed accompanied by his family.

Several challenges faced the Wahrām II during his reign, including a long-running rebellion by his brother (or cousin?), prince Ormies (Hormozd), and major setbacks in the Sasanian war against Rome.[32] Vladimir Lukonin suggested that the bas-relief at Sar Mašhad was the earliest of Wahrām's reliefs and thus dated between 276 and 283 C.E.[33]

The Haft-Tanān Museum Bas-Relief

This bas-relief was accidentally discovered by a swimmer in a waterspout at the foothills of Pahnu (Pahnā) Mount in Dārāb, close to the relief of the Sasanian king, Šāpur I (239/40-270/2 C.E.). It was transferred in 2001 to the Haft-Tanān Museum in Shiraz by the local Cultural Heritage Organization.[34]

In 2009, while cataloging the objects in the museum, I studied this particular relief, registered as no. 186 in the Museum Inventory List [Figs. 3-4]. The depiction lies within an irregular rectangular frame (70 × 75 cm; 4 cm deep); thus, its size is smaller than all other known Sasanian reliefs. The king appears in profile to the right with his body and legs facing frontally; he wears a serrated crown topped by a ball and a long-pleated robe that extends to his ankles. The height of the king's figure is 65 cm with his hair shown to be high atop his head. A sword or a dagger sheath is strapped to the left side of his waist and extends to his ankle.

Facing the king is a lion, 44 cm tall, standing on its hind legs to attack. The king grasps the lion's head (or probably raised forelegs) with his left hand while with his right, thrusts a dagger into the lion's belly. His mouth wide-open and angrily

[28] Herrmann, 1970: 168.
[29] Herrmann, 1970: 167.
[30] Von Gall, 1977: 151.
[31] Bivar, 1972: 280.
[32] Weber, 2009: 1.
[33] Lukonin, 1979: 21.
[34] Shafiei, 2004: 198; Huff, 1995: 417.

roaring ready to bite, the lion tries to claw the king; he lays his right paw on the king's left leg, but the monarch calmly and courageously fights him.

This depiction is very similar to the Sasanian silver-gilt plate from Klimova, which shows the king stabbing a leopard.[35] The same iconography can be seen on Achaemenid seal impressions found at Persepolis,[36] as well as on the door jamb relief representing a king in combat with a lion or a lion-headed monster (in the Hall of a Hundred Columns, and the palaces of Darius and Xerxes)[37]. Due to the surface weathering of the Haft Tanān relief, its details are difficult to see.

As for the date of the relief, Dietrich Huff believes that the king's crown is similar to those of both Šāpur I and II yet cannot be exclusively attributed to one of them. It seems that Šāpur II has left some trace of himself in the Dārāb region.[38] Fatemeh Shafiei[39] also suggested that the relief probably belongs to the Šāpur I and referred to an unpublished report by Massoud Azarnoush who believed that the relief is not of Šāpur I's reign.[40] In contrast, Milad Vandaei referred to Massoud Azarnoush's arguments (in the same unpublished report) and dated the relief to the Šāpur II.[41]

In addition to these two examples, lion images can be found on another relief. In Ardašīr I's investiture by Ahurā Mazdā at Naqš-e Rostam, on the chest and hip of Ardašīr I's horse are five disks embossed with lions' heads applied to its body (three on breast, and two on top of hip or the back of his horse's saddle) and collar above a trilingual inscription[42] [Fig. 5]. Lion hunting scenes can also be found at Taq-e Bostān, as discussed by Markus Mode, who suggested that there was originally a lion-hunt scene in the main central field of the great Ivān.[43] Also, in the relief of Wahrām II and his court in NRo III, the third dignitary to the left wears a cap that terminates in the front in form of a lion's head.[44] Apart from the small lion depictions in these reliefs, a small relief of a lion, measuring 0.50 m long, 0.60 m high, and 2 cm deep, was discovered in 1971 at Naqš-e Rostam, about 10 m west of Narseh's relief [Fig. 6]. This lion shown is running to the right; its paws and tail are broken and the background is not smoothed.[45] Since there is no similarity between this relief and the lions depicted in the other Sasanian reliefs, it cannot date to the Sasanian Period and thus remains undated.

Royal rock reliefs were no longer carved for nearly 200 years, that is, between the late 4th to the late 6th centuries. The image of the Sasanian king hunting, however, appears on the Sasanian silver vessel[46] during the reign of Šāpur II (309-379 C.E.).

[35] Harper & Meyers, 1981: 131 and 225: pl. 24; Skupniewicz, 2020.
[36] Schmidt, 1957b: pls. 2; 3; 5; 11.
[37] Schmidt, 1957a: pls. 114-117; 144-145 and 195-196; Huff, 1995: 417.
[38] Huff, 1995: 417.
[39] Shafiei, 2004: 199.
[40] Shafiei, 2004: 192.
[41] Vandaei, 2011: 211.
[42] Schmidt, 1970: 123.
[43] Mode, 2006: 398-399, and 412.
[44] Schmidt, 1970: 129.
[45] Roaf, 1974: 199.
[46] The images on the royal silver plate are stereotyped and the representations remain largely unchanged in style and form for several centuries. Only minor variations occur in the iconography and design. Particularly distinctive is the representation of drapery in a series of short, paired lines. The date of these

Although several silver vessels are contemporaneous with rock reliefs, during this period they become the medium of royal propaganda instead of the rock reliefs; their effectiveness perhaps all the greater because of their mobility.[47]

On many of these plates, the king engages in animal combat [Figs. 7-8]. Although details of the king's crown in the Haft-Tanān is similar to that of Šāpur I or Šāpur II on the coins, it must be considered that this bas-relief was discovered close to Šāpur I's bas-relief at Dārābgerd, and cannot belong to the period during which the tradition of bas-relief carving disappeared in Fars [Fig. 9]. Therefore, I believe that the king in the Haft-Tanān relief is Šāpur I, wearing his first style of crown with its large and tall globe and that this is the crown appearing in the Naqš-e Rostam and Bīšāpūr reliefs as well as on his coins.[48] In the photogrammetric photographs of the Haft-Tanān relief, horizontal pleated lines can be seen behind the king, possibly remnants of a pleated ribbon that starts from behind the crown, widening as it falls down his back, beneath the hair gathered in his crown, and continues to the middle of his waist [Fig. 10-12]. Normally, even in high-quality photography, this ribbon is not visible. If these carved lines shown in the photogrammetric images are ribbons, then assigning this relief to Šāpur II may be possible because, in addition to having a crown, he also has a ribbon hanging behind him in his relief at Taq-e Bostān.[49] Another point is that Šāpur II's crown at Taq-e Bostān has some differences from this crown.

In the statue of Šāpur I in the Šāpur Cave (in Tang-e Čogān), such a ribbon[50] (the two ends of the diadem, which, once tied & knotted around the monarchs head/base of his crown) can be seen behind the king's head, which hangs down from behind the crown to the lower part of his waist. Therefore, this ribbon has been used vertically for Šāpur I's statue, while in his reliefs, this ribbon is in form of wavy horizontal and starts from behind his crown.[51]

On the statue, the dorsal and frontal lobes of the crown have been damaged by water, and only their lower parts are visible. Probably in the frontal of the crown, instead of a crenel, there was a different element.

The high-resolution photograph of the relief uncovered a monogram/sign (and some lines/decoration?) on the upper part of the middle crenel of the crown (on the lower part of the high globe), which is probably a family insignia or decoration on the crest, but the details are not clear as it has been eroded. However, the upper part is probably the upper part of a shears-like insignia,[52] and another possibility is that it is

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vessels with royal hunters is suggested in part by the appearance of the royal crown, often identifiable through a comparison with Sasanian coins. Details of dress and equipment compared with images on securely dated relics (reliefs, coins, and seals) also provide some guidance in establishing a chronological sequence (Harper, 1965: 594).

[47] Harper, 1965: 594.

[48] see Göbl, 1971: type I/1; Gyselen, 2003: 190, Tafel 30-38.

[49] Herzfeld, 1928: fig. 21; Fukai *et al.*, 1985: pl. XXIII.

[50] For more information about the ribbons that once tied & knotted around the monarchs head/base of his crown, see: Lerner, 2010: 251-252.

[51] Herrmann *et al.*, 1989: 24-25.

[52] It is worth mentioning that a shears-like emblem can be seen in the early Sasanian rock reliefs: such as on the hats of the fourth and fifth persons to the left of Wahrām II in Naqš-e Rostam III, and the first dignitary to the left of Wahrām II at Naqš-e Bahram. It can also be seen on the tall round hat of Kartīr depicted in several bas reliefs, such as Naqš-e Rostam II (the triumph of Šāpur I over Valerian relief), Sar Mašhad, etc. Also, the upper part of this emblem might be compared to the upper part of another emblem

the remains of decorations, which can be seen on of the Šāpur I' hat in the rock reliefs of Naqš-e Rostam, Bīšāpūr, etc[53] [Fig. 13]. The latter idea, in my opinion, is more accurate. If we view it as a family emblem, this crenelated crown might have been one of Šāpur I's unofficial crowns.

The next issue is the gender of the two lions shown in the relief. At Sar Mašhad, the lion is male and mature, with its mane reflecting its great strength, but in the Haft-Tanān relief, the sex of the lion cannot be determined; the current picture is similar to that of a female lion; however, its mane may have been eroded by the water in which it was found.

There are other reasons to attribute the relief in the Haft-Tanān Museum to Šāpur I, and thus to the early Sasanian Period. We note that the standing king uses both hands to attack the lion while standing, showing its maximum danger, reminiscent or in imitation of the relief showing the king's or royal hero's combat with a lion or lion-headed monster in the Persepolis[54] bas-reliefs.

In Sasanian art and architecture, we can see a reflection of imitating the art of the Achaemenid Period in the works of the early Sasanian kings, especially in the time of Ardašīr I (224-239/40 C.E.) and Šāpur I. It may be that the Sasanians considered the Achaemenids as their real ancestors and imitated their iconography and decorative elements in their royal art and architecture. Some scholars have already discussed the tendency of the Sasanians to connect themselves to their ancestors.[55] If we accept this idea, it is clear that the artists and stonemasons who portrayed the combats of the king with the lion in the Sar Mašhad and Haft-Tanān Museum reliefs had already seen and imitated their work from the Persepolis reliefs. Because the artists and stonemasons could not accurately draw the scene without having an idea in the mind, this pattern was later continued in the silver plates with great delicacy.

The Haft-Tanān relief is a close imitation of the Persepolis bas-reliefs and the gestures of animal and king, as presented, are the same.[56] The king is accurately depicted in an informal royal gesture as he fights in the real scene (It may have occurred in his nearby hunting ground/park in Dārāb region), and is reminiscent of the king's battle with the lion in the Throne Hall in Persepolis. The photogrammetric photo [Fig. 12] shows that the carving of the relief was, for some reason, halted before the background was smoothed and polished; indeed, it is not smooth like the other

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on the hat of Ardašir's page in Fīrūzābād I, Naqš-e Rostam I, and Naqš-e Rajab III. Also, it can be seen in the relief of Naqš-e Rostam VII (Vanquished foe of Hormozd II), see: Schmidt, 1970: 141; Vanden Berghe, 1984: fig. 12.

[53] Herrmann *et al.*, 1989: 24-25.

[54] Such as on the western doorway of the main hall in Harem of Xerxes (Schmidt, 1957a: pl. 195), on southern doorways (south and north jambs) in the western wall of Throne Hall (Schmidt, 1957a: pl. 115); as well as on western doorway of the main hall in the palace of Darius (Schmidt, 1957a: pl.146). In addition, the gesture of king and lion is also imitated from the King/Hero's combat with the lion-headed monster on the eastern doorway of the main hall of Harem of Xerxes (Schmidt, 1957a: pl. 196), also with Horned Lion-Headed monster on the northern doorway in the eastern hall of Throne hall (Schmidt, 1957a: pl. 116).

[55] Canepa, 2010: 563-596; "Sasanian kings used rock reliefs to connect themselves to the remnants of the Achaemenid dynasty at Naqš-e Rustam, weaving the entire site into a larger meaningful whole that blurred the temporal and political discontinuities that separated the two dynasties" (Canepa, 2013: 856).

[56] Skupniewicz, 2020.

Sasanian reliefs. The marks of the chisel can be seen in the form of wavy grooves all around the outline of the figures [Figs. 3, and 9-12].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the lion can be seen from earlier times to modern days on seals, wall paintings, metalwork, and stone reliefs throughout the Near East and especially in Iran as it, as the 'king of beasts' is the worthiest combatant of the king. For the ancient Iranians, it had a special status because it symbolized power, courage, bravery, and heroism. There exist many appellatives in Iranian culture and the Persian language, such as 'Šīrmard' (lion-hearted [male gendered]), 'Šīrzan' (lion-hearted [female gendered]) and 'Šīrdel' (lion-hearted [no gender]) .

It may be that hunting wild animals were a form of royal activity that helped to define the nature of Sasanian kingship, as it had done for many earlier Near Eastern cultures, especially in Mesopotamia and Iran. Hunting emphasized the king's skill and manly prowess and demonstrated not merely his mastery of the animal world but the rest of nature. In addition to lions, boars and bears were a worthy challenge to kingly mettle. As a proxy for warfare, hunting conveyed an idea of the king's martial power to his subjects and his enemies alike.

During the Sasanian Period, lion hunting was one of the most important interests and pastimes of kings to the extent that most Sasanian silver dishes depicted a king battling a lion. In addition to metalwork, the depiction of a king battling a lion has been seen on these two Sasanian reliefs. Prudence Harper suggested that the hunting scene in the Sar Mašhad bas-relief is the earliest dynastic monument illustrating a royal hunt.[57] If my hypothesis and dating of the reliefs, as proposed by others are correct, then the slaying of a lion by a king (i.e., Šāpur I) in the Haft-Tanān relief is the oldest depiction of animal hunting in Sasanian royal art, predating the Wahrām II relief at Sar Mašhad relief.

In the Sasanian Period, the reason for creating reliefs illustrating a king battling predatory animals such as lions is due to the king's interest in hunting as a royal task and also for political reasons. It may also be interpreted as symbolic as are the scenes at Persepolis where the royal hero or the king subdues the lion alone.

The political implications of the two reliefs are clear: the king displays his strength and courage by his battle with the most powerful and frightening creature, the lion, to prove that no creature has the ability to defeat him. Wahrām II's bas-relief was created for political purposes because he had been pictured fending off a deadly animal simply with a dagger; his lack of a sword sheath on his waist further attests to his prowess and bravery. His companions have been portrayed as indifferent to the fight taking place before them because they believe that Wahrām himself has the strength to defeat the lion. Kartīr's appearance in the relief demonstrates its political and religious significance. Wahrām II ordered the relief to show that he was the most powerful king of his time and to demonstrate his ability to conquer his enemies as he does the lion. The inclusion of the high priest and the royal family probably means that Wahrām was also showing his enemies that he has the support of

[57] Harper, 1986.

his royal family and the highest-ranked Zoroastrian leader.[58] In contrast, the Haft-Tanān relief shows a real hunting event and may have fewer political implications because the king is depicted alone. The king has a stiletto or a dagger that has penetrated the lion's chest or stomach. These two reliefs were imitated from the reliefs of a king or hero battle with a lion or a lion monster at Persepolis palaces. And it can be explained that the Sasanian were interested in their ancestor's arts, which undoubtedly the artists and stonemasons who carved these reliefs, had been visited the reliefs of Persepolis palaces. These imitations probably were done in the interest of the kings, as the Persepolis were very known and respected for the Sasanian, and we can see their remains such as graffiti,[59] and Middle Persian inscriptions on the site.[60]

Fig. 1. Bas- relief of Wahrām II at Sar Mašhad (Photo by P. Ghasemi, 2009).

[58] "Wahrām II was a devout follower and patron of Zoroastrianism. His religious policy was decisively shaped by his promotion of the mowbed Kerdir on whom he showered extraordinary honours and powers. By that, Kerdir got decisive space to intensively foster Zoroastrianism and, at the same time, to persecute all other religions, not the least the Christians and the Manichaeans. It was in Wahrām II's time that the first persecution of the Christians took place" (Weber, 2009: 1).

[59] De la Füye, 1928: 168; Herzfeld, 1941: figs. 401-402; Schmidt, 1957a: 58 and 258, pl. 199; Sami, 1954; 1960: 273-274; Calmeyer, 1976: Abb.3-4, 270-276; Razmjou, 2005; Callieri, 2006.

[60] Frye, 1966.

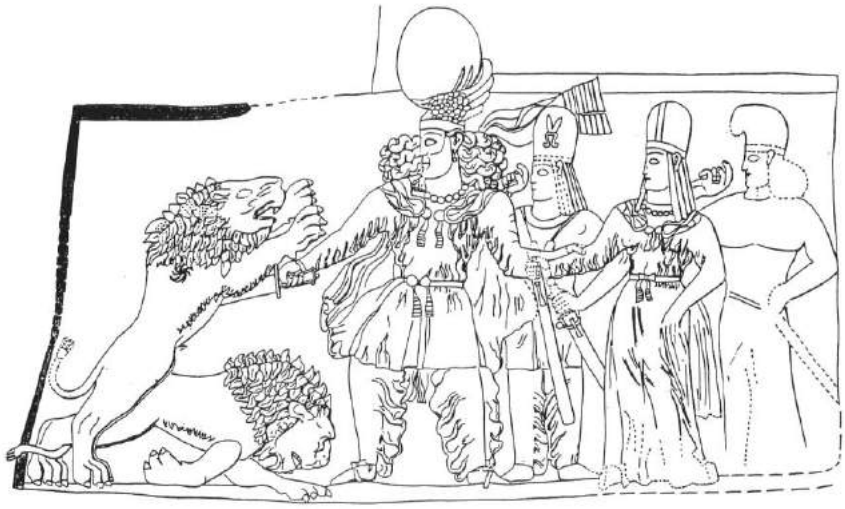

Fig. 2. Bas- relief of Wahrām II at Sar Mašhad (Drawing: after Trümpelmann, 1975: Taf. 7 and shoulder ornament or hair whorl was added by Tanabe, 1990: fig. 2b).

Fig. 3. The Sasanian Bas-relief in Haft-Tanān Museum of Shiraz (The king slaying a lion, photo by P. Ghasemi 2009).

Fig. 4. Drawing of the Sasanian Bas-relief in Haft-Tanān Museum of Shiraz (Reconstruction drawings by M‘asomeh Heidarifar and P. Ghasemi)

Fig. 5. Disks embossed lions heads applied to breast collar above trilingual inscription at Naqš-e Rostam on the lower part of the Ardašīr I' horse; Naqš-e Rostam I: relief of investiture of Ardašīr I by Ahurā Mazdā (Photo by Hamed Molaei Kordshuli).

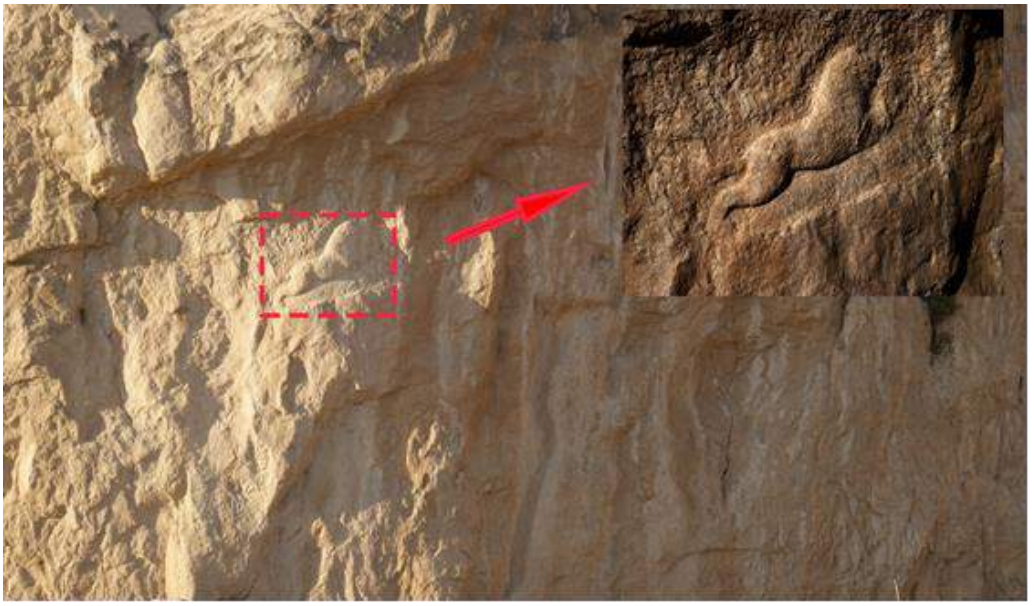

Fig. 6. A minor lion relief in the west of the Narseh's relief at Naqš-e Rostam (Photo by Hamed Molaei Kordshuli).

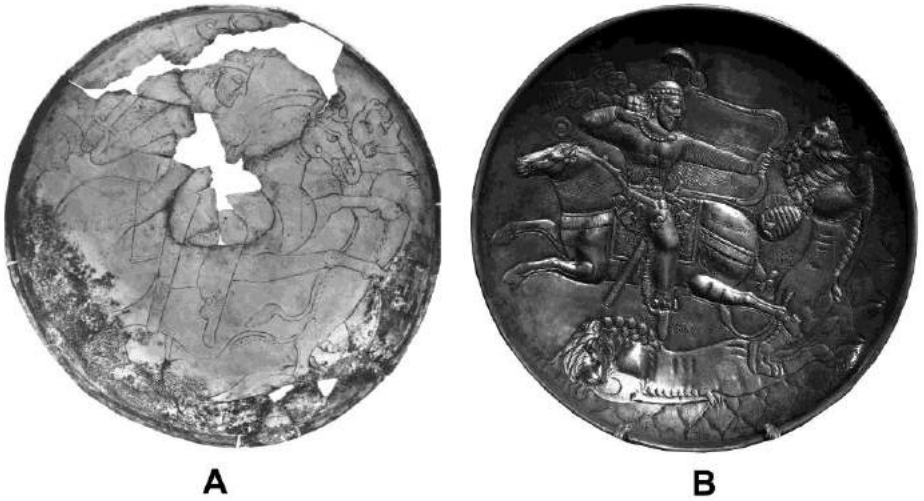

Fig. 7. Two Sasanian dishes with a depiction of the king hunting a lion;
A: Silver-gilt plate from Chilek. king hunting a lion and a leopard, Republican Museum of history and culture of Uzbekistan, Samarkand (after Harper & Meyers, 1981: pl. 30).
B: Ardašīr II (379-383 C.E.) dispatching lions, Silver, Dia. 28.6 cm, Found in Sari, Mazandaran, National Museum of Iran (after Biglari & Abdi, 2014: 108).

Fig. 8. A number of Sasanian dishes with the depiction of the king hunting a lion
A: Silver-gilt plate with Šāpur II (309-379 C.E.) hunting lions, Hermitage Museum (after Harper & Meyers, 1981: pl. 37; Pope, 1938: 210).
B: Silver-gilt plate, Hormozd II (303-309 C.E.). Cleveland Museum of Art, (after Harper & Meyers, 1981: pl. 14).
C: Silver-gilt plate from Klimova, King stabbing a Leopard, Hermitage Museum (after Harper & Meyers, 1981: pl. 24).
D: Pur-e Vahman Silver plate with mounted bowman shooting lion, with Middle Iranian inscription, applied repousse and engraved, Hermitage Museum. (after Harper & Meyers, 1981: fig. 64; Pope, 1938: 217).
E: Dish with the royal hunt for lion and boar, end 6th-beg. 7th C.E. Silver. Dia. 19.2 cm. Found before 1903; purchased in Kutais, Georgia (after Harper & Meyers, 1981: fig.46).
F: Plate with Šāpur III (383-388 C.E.) dispatching a lion or leopard, silver, applied repousse and engraved, Found 1907, Hermitage Museum. (after Harper & Meyers, 1981: pl. 31).

Fig. 9. Detailed image of the king's head at the Sasanian Bas-relief of Haft-Tanān Museum (photo by P. Ghasemi, 2009).

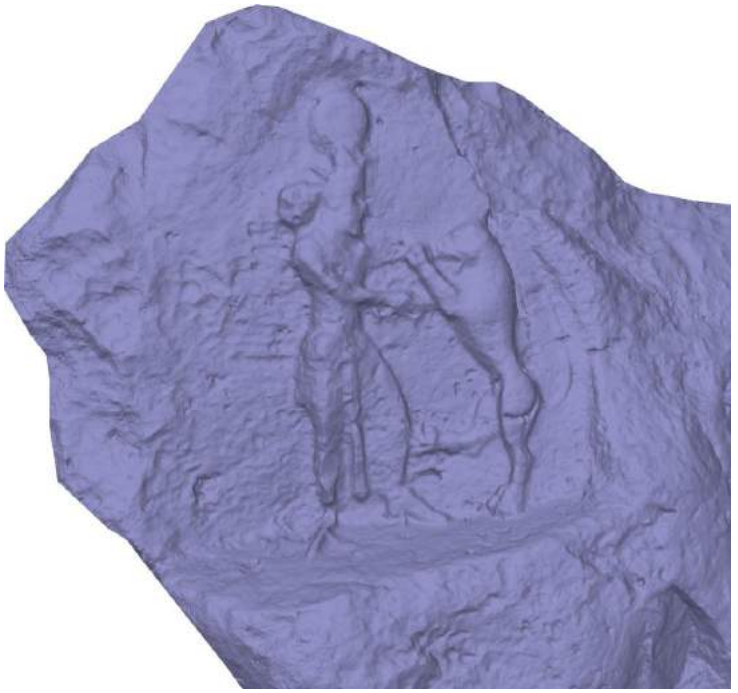

Fig. 10. Photogrammetry image of the Sasanian Bas-relief of Haft-Tanān Museum (photo by P. Ghasemi).

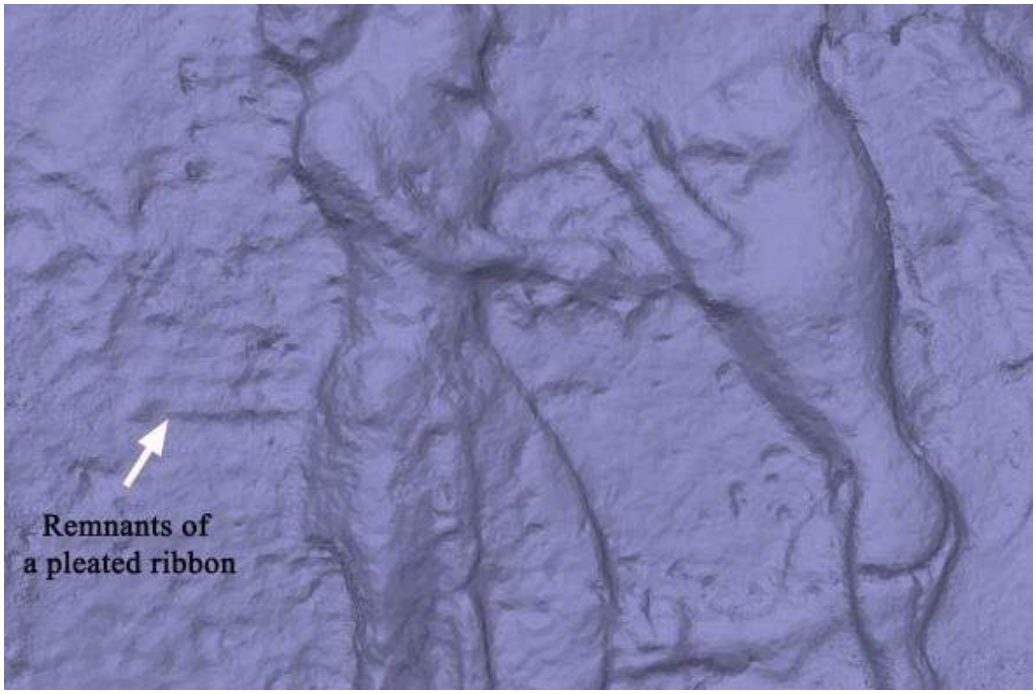

Fig. 11. ‘Remnant of a pleated ribbon’; Photogrammetry image of the Sasanian Bas-relief of Haft-Tanān Museum (photo by P. Ghasemi).

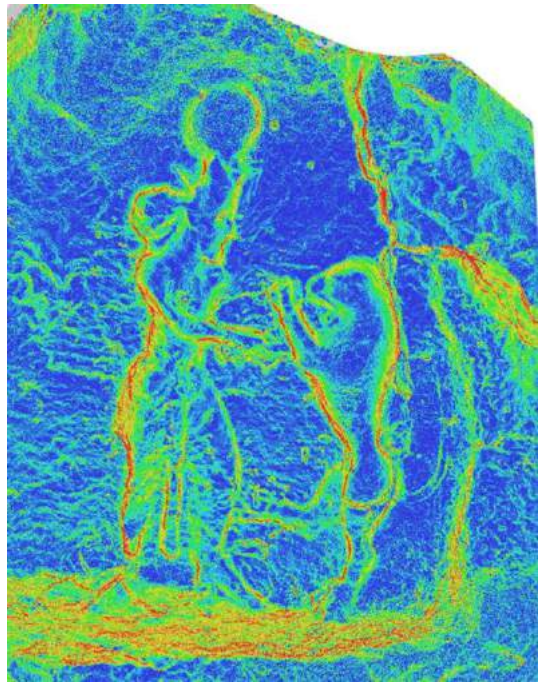

Fig. 12. UV scan of the Sasanian Bas-relief of Haft-Tanān Museum shows the lines and details (photogrammetry by P. Ghasemi).

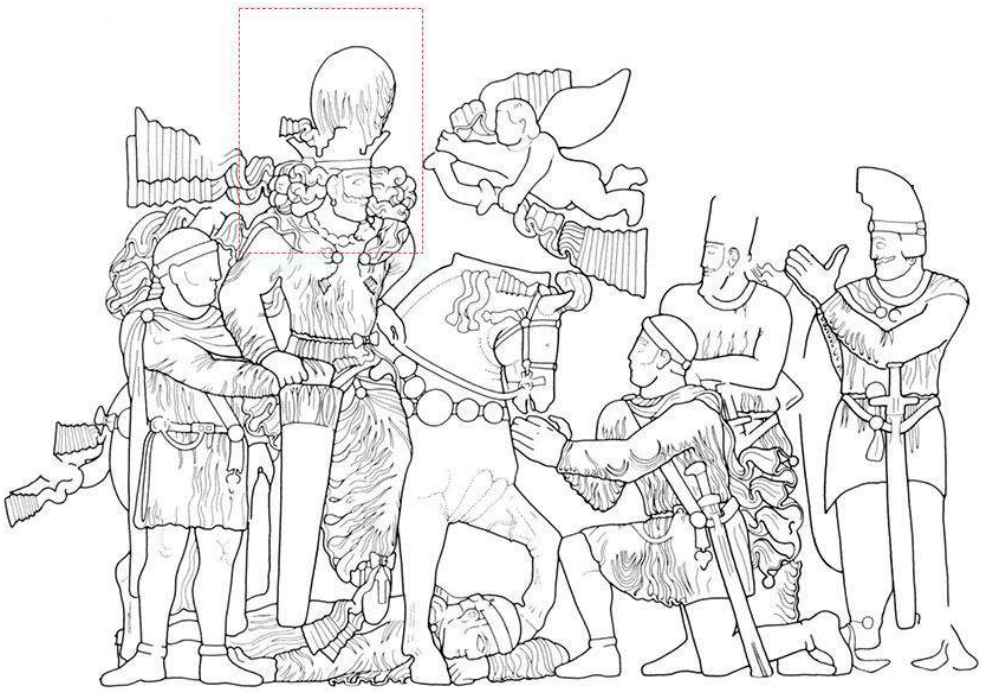

Fig. 13. The Central scene of Šāpur I's rock relief in Bīšāpūr II, and a detail of his crenelated crown (after Herrmann *et al.*,1989: 26)

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